## **Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting**

# Unofficial Meeting Minutes April 2, 2013

#### **Commission Members Present:**

Mike Arnold

Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association

Michael Donahue

Chancellor's Designee from LSU

Louis Romero

Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana

Karen St. Germain

Louisiana State Representative, Governor's Appointee

Dwayne Thevis

Louisiana State Fire Fighters Association

Boyd Westbrook

Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association

### **Other Attendees**

Carey King – FETI Chuck Albert – LFCA

Jacques Picou – LFCA

Russell DiSalavio – LFCA

Bobby Guilbeau - Ward 5 FD/Evangeline

Greg Savoy - Acadia/Evangeline

Berl Adams - Church Point VFD

Raymond Ledoux - Church Point VFD

Adam Cline - LFCA

Jim Montez - LPFD #3

Kully Griffin - LPFD #3

Chad Roberson - SGFPD

Jerry Tarleton - SGFPD

Ken Himel – Bayou Cane FD

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Karen St. Germain . The roll of commission members was called and a quorum declared. Acceptance of minutes from the earlier month was deferred to the following meeting to allow for distribution and reading by commission members. The group declared the meeting unofficial and without a quorum.

Ms. St. Germain inquired whether there was an agenda. Mr. Donahue replied that there was none, but that since there was no agenda for the postal requirement and there would be no votes, the meeting could be either official or unofficial. Ms. St. Germain asked whether there was a date on the directors, and Mr. Donahue affirmed that there was a date, and that George was in agreement with the procedure to interview candidates for a position.

Mr. Donahue relayed that the interviews would begin after the commission narrowed the field of candidates. The interview panel would be composed of three persons: Butch, Mr. Donahue, and an

from LSU central administration representative. After narrowing the field, an open forum would be conducted, seeking a large response through announcing the forum by means of the newspaper and Facebook. The top two candidates, having been selected, would be asked ten canned questions each to be answered without hearing the other's response. The second candidate would be in the Green Room, and then the forum would be opened for audience participation, which would be conducted as if it were coming from a committee. The questions from the audience would have to be written, because the queries would subsequently be reviewed to assure that they were EEOC required.

Mr. Donahue stressed that the FETI seeks transparency on the process, as well as a hard date for an executive session.

Mr. Donahue stated that the group should agree to a hard date for an executive session. At that point, he would send the proposed plan electronically for the members to review it for a week to ten days before the meeting. This approach would allow everyone to prepare their questions, while allowing the meeting to last for 3 or 4 hours, rather than 10.

Ms. St. Germain enquired about having minutes and Mr. Donahue stated that a recorder was available. Mr. Donahue reported that the usual transcriber, Carol Madre, had obtained employment at Southeastern, that one transcriber was returning from Italy shortly, and that two others had been hired; Mr. Donahue related that Ms. G would get the minutes by email when they were complete.

Ms. St. Germain announced that this meeting would be about the discussion and application process of the new director.

#### **Director's Report**

Mr. Donahue reported that the FETI had been conducting a nationwide search for the last 30 days for a new director, using the websites of LSU and FETI, and had been directed to the North American fire training directors, NOLA, The Advocate and careerbuilders.com.

The effort brought 36 applicants, 9 of whom failed to meet the minimum requirements. The cutoff was at the minimum requirements; an applicant might otherwise have an associate's degree, and 5 did not. Although 4 of the candidates had a bachelor's degree, neither was the degree related to fire science or emergency management; neither did these 4 have demonstrated experience in those fields.

Mr. Donahue continued by saying that of the remaining 27 male applicants, 9 are Louisiana residents, 2 have terminal degrees and 3 have pending terminal degrees. There are 14 with masters' degrees, 7 have bachelor's degrees, with one associate degree. Nine have chief command experience in their titles, and five came from executive level fire academy backgrounds.

Mr. Donahue went on to say that the next step would be to pick a hard date for executive session, since the applicants would not be discussed in open forum. Ten days before that date, he would e-mail the applicant files to each commission member for review, in order to have a productive and efficient meeting. By voice vote, the commission at that time would reduce the number of 27 to an appropriate number.

Mr. Donahue noted that a subset committee of the state fire marshal, himself, and an LSU senior central administrator then would sit together to interview the candidates and thus narrow the field again.

Background checks would be run, and then an LSU public forum would be held to allow the fire service to meet the candidates. Mr. Donahue noted that canned questions would be applied, such as why the applicants felt qualified, based on their credentials, to lead the LSU fire and emergency training institute. Questions would be taken from those attending the forum.

A second time, the questions must be written for LSU's human resource management to make sure they complied with the EEOC boxes. Mr. Donahue added that FETI fully complied. Again, the three panel subset would discuss the live interviews, with Mr. Donahue ultimately choosing the individual who would be the best fit to work at LSU with the fire service.

Mr. Donahue stressed that he wanted the process to be completely transparent, because previous critics had felt that the ongoing met behind closed doors, and without the input of the fire service.

The question was asked why the nine were disqualified, because the notion had been that all candidates would be initially accepted. Mr. Donahue replied that the question had come up in the last meeting and that the decision was made that no one would be acceptable without an associate degree. Mr. Donahue offered to locate the names.

The comment was made that even candidates with associate degrees had no fire service experience or a fire science associate degree, and that such an individual would be less suitable than a candidate who was a fire chief for 25 years. Mr. Donahue agreed, and admitted that the commission was split on that point for two meetings, but the final decision was that the cut would be made at whether the person had an associate degree and whether there was fire service experience.

Ms. St. Germain recalled that the discussion eventually led to the approach that when an otherwise qualified candidate had no degree, that the lack thereof would not be a factor to reject the candidate. Ms. St. Germain submitted that there were unknowns to look at first.

Mr. Donahue offered to surface the names from human resources, and Ms. St. Germain agreed. Mr. Donahue reminded the committee that if no associate degree would be required, the ad would have to be rerun.

The question was asked what a fire academy background or fire commander background on the executive level actually meant. Mr. Donahue replied that the answer had yet to be determined by the commission, and that the 9 people interviewed had "Chief" in their titles.

Ms. St. Germain recognized Mr. Blanc, who asked about her schedule for April 24<sup>th</sup>, which would give them two weekends, or a two and a half day weekend.

Ms. St. Germain said she might be able to meet after the Legislative breakfast on April 24<sup>th</sup>, especially since the committee members would all be there.

Mr. Donahue noted that he would be attending the FDIC conference in Indianapolis, whereupon Ms. St. Germain suggested the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> of April could be a tentative date.

Ms. St. Germain recognized Chuck Albert. Mr. Albert asked whether those candidates with a bachelors' degree or higher had prior service experience, when reviewed by the human resource department. Mr. Donahue replied that they had no fire service experience.

Mr. Albert responded that he considered those with fire service experience to be of more weight than those with degrees in non-corresponding subjects, and suggested that those with fire service experience, but no associate degree, might be placed back into the hopper.

Mr. Albert and Mr. Donahue discussed how the subset committee might narrow down the candidates. Mr. Donahue noted that a 9 member subset committee, of which he is a member, would review the candidates for the absolutely most qualified individuals. Mr. Albert suggested that there was no set number and that everyone should have an equal shot, and Mr. Donahue agreed.

Mr. Albert urged that the commission would look at the duties of the candidates, rather than just title and rank, noting that in the smaller departments, some positions did more work than others. Mr. Albert asked who would make the final decision, and Mr. Donahue said that he would, adding that the individual would work directly under him as an LSU employee. Mr. Donahue added that after the forum, he would garner impressions from the subcommittee to advise him on an informed decision. Mr. Donahue assured Mr. Albert that there existed a clear divide between the ranks and duties among the candidates.

Mr. Albert repeated the call for transparency and applauded the efforts of those involved. Mr. Donahue responded that he accepted all advice and counsel from the group members.

Ms. St. Germain thanked Mr. Albert for his view and noted that the man hired for the job, even with Mr. Donahue's decision, would have to work with the fire service as well.

Ms. St. Germain recognized Chief Rexall, of Acadian Management, who suggested that the procedure might entail an intermediate selection of candidates whereupon a background check would be forthcoming, rather than wait until there were the final three candidates .

Ms. St. Germain agreed. Mr. Donahue added that the commission could recommend a background check at that time, noting that a background check is \$250 and takes 4 to 7 weeks to complete, with the inclusion of fingerprints, which in turn would have return by mail; he said he would like to see a background check run on all these people, and would be open to whatever comments.

Chief Rexall recommended that the number of candidates be diminished from 50 people to five or six by the background process. Mr. Donahue agreed and stated that the final choice would find the most qualified candidate, with no set number.

Ms. St. Germain recognized Chuck Albert, who asked when the open forum and the notification might occur. Mr. Donahue replied that with a line drawn in the sand, a natural selection would assure that those above would have a higher degree of knowledge or experience. Mr. Donahue added that the second to last step would be the reconvening of the commission, who having attended the public forum, would have first-hand feedback, rather than tertiary feedback.

Mr. Albert called for discussion on a public forum, which Mr. Donahue did not envision happening by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Donahue reiterated that after the commission met and then ran the background checks, the next step would depend on the number selected, pointing out that with ten people selected, the commission's next task would be to interview and coordinate schedules. If the process took only six weeks, he would be the happiest person at the table.

Ms. St. Germain suggested a target date of July 1<sup>st</sup>, three months from the meeting, yet not set in stone. Mr. Donahue agreed. Ms. St. Germain further stated that after waiting so long, the members were ready to put in an extra day.

Mr. Donahue noted that if the date was the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, that he would run conference calls to further the process.

Ms. St. Germain called for further questions from the commission and the public attending, and invited the attendees to e-mail, text, or call the members of the commission as the procedure went forward to share thoughts and serious discussions about what was most needed

Mr. Donahue added that once the commission narrowed the field, the candidate names would become public record, and the names were simply being held at that time for the consideration and confidentiality of the candidates.

Ms. St. Germain agreed, noting that the confidentiality was due to the candidates' ongoing positions at other jobs. The chairperson mentioned that Chancellor Jenkins still remained on the campus, and that being expeditious, she would rather not repeat the selection process with a new chancellor. That being said, Ms. St. Germain noted that she could get new rates, if board members wanted to come to the city the night before.

Ms. St. Germain asked if there were further discussion.

Mr. Donahue noted that if those who wanted to attend had no allowance for overnight stay in the budget, that they could come as guests of LSU. noting that there was a discussion about the contract at an earlier meeting.

Mr. Donahue replied that the chairperson was speaking of the "facilities use" agreement, and that The agreement had been 90% reworked and was at the Board of Regents for final approval. He added that he hoped for a definitive answer by Friday, and would send it out for their review. He noted also that it was extremely condensed, and it allowed that those interested in the code, to reference it, but that the agreement was only a page.

Ms. St. Germain mentioned that Monday was the start of a legislative session with bills, and that one was on behalf of FETI and the CDL license.

Mr. Donahue thanked her and mentioned that the commission was asked to do a survey in regard to the fire service. The document would go out that week. Cary Gates mentioned that the document had already gone out.

Mr. Donahue replied that the document would go out like an initial email blast. Those that were unanswered would be sent a hard copy with a link to give respondents a second chance. The window for response would be open for six weeks, sent with the intent of going to the Chief or Chief Training Officer of each department. Cary asked where the data base originated. Mr. Donahue responded that the data base came from the Fire Marshall's office and was bedded with the present database.

Cary Gates said 430 e-mail addresses had gone out that day. Mr. Donahue added that one response would be counted per FDID number, and the responses from the email addressees would be tracked. Cary Gates offered that if a kick-back list were to be provided, his department would place the names in a database with the correct e-mail addresses, and return them. Mr. Gates also added that his department would find who the Chief of each department was and obtain good email addresses, thereby saving the commission money.

Mr. Donahue thanked Mr. Gates and apologized for not reaching out for help in the beginning.

Jacque asked for the percentage of keeping up with an effective email list each year. Mr. Donahue responded that EIFD reporting was about 65 percent, and that one could log on and the Chief or the access person of the department would change the information. Jacque noted that Mr. Donahue was speaking of a 40 percent deficiency, yet it was one that was actually improved.

Mr. Donahue said the proposed database help offered electronic rather than regular mail, a highly preferable change, and that the data would go to Cary Gates, allowing everyone to see it at the same time. All of the mail would go through LSU's main frame rather than the one at FETI.

Ms. St. Germain remarked that the Chiefs should be notified that that email was coming, and if they didn't receive it, to please notify. Mr. Donahue said he would give a copy to Ms. St. Germain.

Mr. Donahue asked about the next meeting. Ms. St. Germain suggested that a final discussion might be introduced on April 11<sup>th</sup>, the second Tuesday or next Thursday. Mr. Donahue responded that the target date was set for the second Thursday of every month, but that the present meeting had been postponed for two weeks.

Ms. St. Germain made a motion that the meeting take place on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and the motion was seconded. Mr. Donahue then suggested that a meeting could also be on the 11<sup>th</sup> allowing the members to go into an executive session. Ms. St. Germain thought that idea sounded possible, and Mr. Donahue noted that the earlier date could provide an accelerated timeline.

Ms. St. Germain's initial date of the  $24^{th}$  and the seconded motion were cancelled and the meeting date was exchanged for the  $11^{th}$ , a Thursday.

Mr. Donahue offered to secure a location away from FETI. Ms. St. Germain declined, saying the conference room at FETI would be fine, and asked whether that location would be acceptable to everyone. Mr. Donahue offered to send e-mails the following day, and said he would ask someone at LSU to release the nine names to him and have all the applicant information by the next day.

Ms. St. Germain offered to have a face-to-face about any issue with those who wanted that discussion, in order to be ready on the  $11^{\text{th}}$ . Mr. Donahue noted that all 27 names would be ready by the next day, and that all names would be available by the  $11^{\text{th}}$ .

Ms. St. Germain asked if the start of the meeting by 1:30 p.m. would be acceptable.

Mr. Donahue said a review of the 27 names would speed the process. Ms. St. Germain responded that they weren't yet at the place to produce a formula. Mr. Donahue replied that he was mentioning it as a thought for consideration.

Those present agreed that a date of 1:30 p.m. on April 11<sup>th</sup> was acceptable for an executive session. An earlier discussed training session was mentioned. Mr. Donahue responded that the commission would have it as soon as he had it in hand.

George noted that he was stepping down as past president, and suggested that a letter should be submitted to Mr. Donahue. Mr. Donahue replied that the letter would go elsewhere, and George replied that it would be directed to the secretary of state's office. George then asked whether that person would be on the commission for the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. St. Germain and Mr. Donahue joined in assuring George that the association will still hold, and that his standing would not affect the commission.

Ms. St. Germain noted that the agenda on the 11<sup>th</sup> would contain a discussion about the May meeting, as well as a discussion of the different state meetings and the necessary procedures. Mr. Donahue suggested that since April was early, the commission could discuss it on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and move the discussion forward to the following month.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Approves by: Kau Stoferman DATE: 1-3-2013